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ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

PROCEEDINGS

Junior Kindergarten: Strategies & Alternatives Workshop

March 9, 1992

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OVERVIEW

The workshop was convened by OPSBA for representatives of the 16 public school boards in Ontario which have not implemented Junior Kindergarten [Table 1]. Participants had the opportunity to learn about actions taken by other Boards to date, to hear from Ministry of Education representatives, and to discuss alternatives and strategies to deal effectively with this matter.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the Provincial Throne Speech of 1989, the government of the day, as one of its restructuring initiatives, declared that all school boards in Ontario would be required, by September 1994, to provide half-day Junior Kindergarten programs for children who would be four years of age by December 31 of that year. While the provision of such programs would no longer be an option for school boards, parents would retain the right to withhold their children from compulsory school attendance until age six years.

Capital and operating funds under the General Legislative Grant regulations, and some incentive funding, were provided beginning in 1990, to assist all school boards offering Junior Kindergarten programs [Table 2].

Based on September 31, 1991 preliminary enrolment data, 66.98 per cent of four-year olds in the province were registered in Junior Kindergarten programs.

Those school boards not offering Junior Kindergarten at the time of the throne speech announcement were concerned about the imposition of a provincially mandated program replacing what had previously been a locally determined option. For several boards, the erosion of local autonomy was exacerbated by concerns about the perceived inability to fund accommodation, transportation, staffing, and curricular costs inherent in providing services for these additional pupils. Concern was expressed too, about the philosophical wisdom and merits of providing a school-based program for three and four year old children.

Planning for the eventual implementation of the newly announced program began in several Boards. Data were collected on estimated costs, and enrolments were projected. At the same time, educators and trustees in several boards raised the question of alternative approaches to the traditional Junior Kindergarten as the most appropriate means of addressing the needs of these young children.

In order to assist our member boards, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association convened a meeting of member boards not currently offering Junior Kindergarten. The workshop was designed to determine common concerns among those boards and to develop effective strategies for addressing them. On March 9, 1992 representatives from 16 public boards met at the Etobicoke Board of Education offices for this purpose. A copy of the day's program as well as a list of participants are appended.

ALTERNATIVES TO JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN - BOARD PROPOSALS

(a) The Five Board Initiative

Following welcoming remarks from Donna Cansfield, Etobicoke Trustee and Chair of OPSBA's Curriculum Committee, and Don McVicor, Director of Education of the Etobicoke Board, participants were informed about the actions taken to date by a coalition of five school boards (Durham, Halton, Waterloo, Wellington and York Region), and their collective attempts to influence government policy through a meeting in November 1991 with Minister of Education, Tony Silipo.

At this meeting, representatives from the five boards expressed grave concerns about the implementation and operating costs of Junior Kindergarten programs for these rapid-growth boards. Additionally, concern was expressed about the apparent contradiction of providing a program for four year olds for only two and a half hours a day when current government philosophy and societal needs indicated a far greater need for community partnerships and the concept of a "seamless day". The presentation to the Minister had been "in principle" only, and was intentionally not detailed. The purpose of the meeting had been to secure from the Minister an indication of whether he would consider alternatives to traditional Junior Kindergarten, in which case specific details and proposals would be forthcoming from the five boards involved. It was noted that to date no formal response had been received from the Minister.

The boards then reported on individual actions they had pursued. Some had clearly taken a firm and public stand at the political level that they were strongly opposed to providing Junior Kindergarten within their jurisdictions, noting the lack of ratepayer demand and support for it. Common to all boards were the very serious concerns about the increased burden on local taxpayers to provide the necessary funds for capital construction and renovations, equipment, and operating costs. It was noted that by increasing the total number of students enroled in a jurisdiction, the overall per pupil funding from the provincial government would be reduced, by virtue of

more students being paid for from the same amount of total available money. Most boards indicated that if extra funding were available, other expenditures would take precedence over Junior Kindergarten.

Representatives from these boards noted that space was available in already existing day care, nursery school, and child care facilities in their communities. It was strongly suggested that school boards should be able to avail themselves of these facilities in order to provide programs for four year old children, rather than spending rare or non-existent dollars on capital projects in schools.

The need for greater co-operation between school boards and early childhood education centre operators was articulated. This co-operation would extend across accommodation, equipment and materials, and staffing. It was suggested, for example, that school boards could provide innovative in-service training for early childhood educators leading to their certification as teachers, and reciprocally, for teachers to earn early childhood education qualifications. Additionally, partnerships with business, industry, and major employers within a board's jurisdiction need to be explored with a view to using existing workplace facilities, and seeking financial assistance from this sector of the community.

Additional issues discussed included the high cost of transportation and the length of time some young students would have to spend on a bus in order to participate in a Junior Kindergarten program. Full day, alternate day scheduling was discussed, as was the concept of multi-age grouping.

It was noted, too, that political support for boards' positions was being obtained from members of the provincial parliament, and from local municipal councils. The suggestion was made that the enormous sums of money currently being spent on child care could and should be reallocated to school boards if they are to assume this additional "social" program. That is, Junior Kindergarten and alternative programs for four year olds should not be regarded as an education issue only, but rather as a much broader societal concern affecting other ministries beyond education.

(b) Grey County Proposal

Representatives of the Grey County Board of Education described in detail the extensive proposal developed by that Board and submitted to the Ministry of Education for consideration. The approach taken began with the philosophical rationale that there was no useful purpose served by bringing four year old children into schools, and what was needed instead was a collaborative, integrative approach

to working with parents and families. Surveys were conducted on available space in all the County's schools, and in existing community childcare facilities. It was noted that there was strong opposition from the community to the government's requirement that the board provide Junior Kindergarten in its schools by 1994.

The Grey County Board prefers an alternative approach which follows an intergenerational model, actively involves parents, has a multiple intelligences focus, provides co-ordinated access opportunities, and co-ordinates services through collaboration with local health, welfare, and social agencies. That is, the Board does not favour "pushing down" programming and curricular expectations from Senior Kindergarten or Grade One, and supports all families having access to <u>some</u> program for four year olds other than the traditional Junior Kindergarten program.

Grey County Board of Education officials have worked closely with the Early Childhood Resource Network in their County, engaging in many successful collaborative projects. Three different models of service delivery were described. Parents would be able to select the model most appropriate for their circumstances. Subsequent to the workshop, the Grey County proposal has received approval for implementation from the Ministry of Education.

(c) Common Features in these two presentations

Concerns about additional costs to local ratepayers, and serious questioning of the appropriateness of traditional Junior Kindergarten programming to meet the social, emotional, physical, and educational needs of four year olds and their parents were expressed. Both presentations called for flexible alternatives which would better meet these needs. It was noted that there was strong community opposition to the imposition of traditional Junior Kindergarten programs from many of the jurisdictions represented.

Co-operation with existing providers of childcare in the community, and the importance of working with these providers around issues of teacher training, use of existing space, and materials and equipment were articulated. Concern about the necessity of employing certified teachers to operate the programs, and the need for flexibility in scheduling and timetabling (for example, total number of days, number of hours) were outlined. Both presentations described the need to determine accurate cost projections, based in part on a detailed analysis of available space and projected enrolment.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION PRESENTATION

Three representatives from the Ministry of Education presented the views of that Ministry and responded to questions from participants. Wally Beevor, Assistant Deputy Minister, Learning Programs Division, and Carola Lane, Assistant Deputy Minister, Regional Services, were accompanied by Howat Noble, Executive Coordinator, Learning Programs Secretariat.

It was made clear that the Minister's position requiring all school boards to provide programs for four year olds in 1994 remains unchanged. However, there is an indication that the Ministry will look seriously at innovative alternatives to the traditional Junior Kindergarten model provided that they are philosophically consistent with the government's commitment to meeting the needs of young children as early as possible in their lives.

Consideration of alternative proposals is to be through the Regional offices of the Ministry and they many be submitted by individual boards or collectively by a number of Boards in a Region. Approval at the Regional level would result in the proposals being sent to the Mowat Block for further consideration.

A number of criteria would be required for proposals to be seriously considered. These include:

- a detailed description of the program itself;
- demonstration of the support and involvement of parents in the community for the proposed alternatives;
- the involvement of the larger community (for example, other ministries and agencies providing services for children);
- a detailed action plan outlining the tasks to be completed and a timeline to 1994 and beyond;
- the identification of an accountable body or organization;
- inclusion of an evaluation component; and
- a budget outline showing anticipated revenues and expenditures, and detailing the local ratepayers' financial contribution to the funding of the proposed alternative.

The representatives discussed the relevance of capital funding if programs were to be offered in other than Board of Education facilities. The current Capital Grant Plan does not make provision for construction or renovation on non-Board-owned facilities.

It was noted that, at present, the staffing of any programs for four year olds would require qualified (Ontario certified) teachers. It was not clear whether this requirement is subject to future modification.

In response to questions from participants, the Assistant Deputy Ministers noted that while the issue of Junior Kindergarten is not currently being discussed in inter-ministerial meetings with other Assistant Deputy Ministers, they would be willing to assist school boards by including it in discussions about Integrated Children's Services.

It was stated that Boards would be able to offer programs in some locations but not others, if there was insufficient enrolment and no parental demand in some areas. Regarding phasing-in of programs, participants were advised that if a phase-in was part of the plan which had the approval of parents in the community, then full implementation by September 1994 would not necessarily be required.

While class size minimums and maximums had not been addressed by the Ministry, it was suggested that Boards would be required to provide either directly or through a purchase agreement, a program even if only one parent requested it. Transportation to and from Junior Kindergarten or alternative programs would be a local Board option, addressed through local policy.

It was pointed out that there currently exists no definitive description of Junior Kindergarten curriculum, making the definition of a "program" problematic. It is anticipated that the Early Years Work Team consultation process will provide some clarity on this question.

Participants received assurance that grant regulations would be interpreted flexibly, provided that there was a cost-sharing ratio between the Ministry of Education and local ratepayers. User fees would not be permitted. Provincial money has been reserved for operating, capital, and equipment costs associated with the implementation of Junior Kindergarten. These funds would similarly be available for approved alternative programs for four year olds.

In response to a question regarding the Ministry's likely actions if a Board refuses to comply with the legislation, a mechanism of review and accountability (review, audit, and follow-up) which currently exists, would likely be followed.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

In the afternoon session, participants divided into two groups to discuss the following questions:

1. **What alternatives do school boards have with regard to the JK initiative?**
   - What are the alternatives for school boards that fall within the Ministry parameters and/or meet the same objectives that JK will?
   - What do you feel about the alternatives presented in the morning?
   - What are the common issues for all school boards?
   - What position(s) should we take?

2. **What can be done to advance our position?**
   - Develop an implementation strategy
     - ▸ achieving measurable points on that strategy by a certain time?
     - ▸ date by which boards will have approved an implementation plan?
     - ▸ options for boards with regard to implementation plans
     - ▸ phased-in-implementation?
     - ▸ what targets for 1994?
     - ▸ by when does the government want it to be fully implemented?

   - Strategies
     - ▸ what are the next steps?
     - ▸ what can be done to advance our position(s)?

Common Strands

Strong concern and opposition to the province's mandating a formerly optional program and requiring implementation and funding at the local level was clearly articulated. This sentiment transcended the Junior Kindergarten issue to other Ministry initiatives such as de-streaming. However, it was agreed that it is better to attempt to negotiate with the Ministry about alternatives than to refuse to comply. Boards must be prepared to demonstrate that any alternative model is superior to the traditional Junior Kindergarten model.

Boards need to begin consulting with their communities to determine local preferences for traditional or alternative approaches. The idea of implementing a model based on a "modified school year" is worth pursuing.

A clear need to work with other community agencies and establish partnerships with them was articulated. The Ministry of Education should be supporting and indeed modelling this co-operation at the provincial level. Such an approach would be consistent with the ideas expressed in the documents Children First and Better Beginnings, Better Futures.

It is felt that the Ministry of Education should be more actively pursuing inter-ministerial assistance and support for the provision of programs for young children. There must be broad recognition that the issues involved transcend education; meeting the needs of these young children is a societal matter that includes health, recreation, and social services.

Concern was expressed that the Ministry does not fully appreciate the significant local costs involved in meeting the requirement to implement this new program. It is anticipated that alternative models to the traditional Junior Kindergarten program would be significantly less expensive to establish and operate.

Undue concern with placating the teachers' federations by guaranteeing that the programs will be staffed only by certified teachers reduces the flexibility for local boards and forces the issue to be regarded as only educational in nature, seriously limiting local solutions to local problems.

There is a definite need to seriously consider early childhood education graduates and child care workers instead of or in addition to certified teachers. Further, child to adult ratios need to be considered (currently 8:1 under the Day Nurseries Act, and 20:1 in Grade 1). The Ministry needs to be less prescriptive and more consultative on the issue of staffing.

Additionally, the Capital Grant Plan needs to be amended to allow Provincial funding for retrofitting and application to non-Board-owned facilities. There are concerns about such facilities not meeting Board health and safety standards.

It was indicated that those Boards already offering Junior Kindergarten are also applying for access to the funds set aside for those Boards which do not yet have the program, thereby potentially reducing the available amount set aside for implementation.

It was suggested that member boards could be polled for information about existing legal opinions if Boards refuse to follow Ministry directives. That is, obtain any available information on punitive actions against school boards for non-compliance.

Identification of three or four alternative models which could be adapted to local needs was recommended. Representatives from a few Boards could work together on developing these models. There is insufficient time and a lack of financial resources for each Board to work independently on such an undertaking. The available timeframe for Boards to develop detailed models and seek approval from the Ministry is very short. It was estimated that a minimum of two years would be required to conduct the necessary work to bring a comprehensive model to fruition. It is imperative that work begin in earnest immediately. Clearly, more time from the Ministry would be highly desirable. There was clear assertion that Boards cannot implement by September 1994 given the current economic realities which they face.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were put forth by the participants:

1. That three or four alternative models which could be adapted to local needs be identified and representatives from a few boards work together on developing these models.

2. That OPSBA assist in the sharing of information among the 16 boards who currently do not offer Junior Kindergarten programs. This information should include board planning and ideas about programs for alternatives to traditional Junior Kindergarten for four year as well as information from other Boards who may already be implementing less than system-wide Junior Kindergarten.

3. That OPSBA re-convene a meeting of these 16 Boards before the end of May, 1992 to further refine the information and adopt common approaches to pursuing the matter.

4. That OPSBA begin lobbying efforts with the Minister and Ministry officials in order to get the Junior Kindergarten issue on the agenda of the Assistant Deputy Ministers from Education, Community and Social Services, and Health. It is important that it be seen as broader than a Education issue.

5. That OPSBA formally request from Assistant Deputy Minister Wally Beevor the list of criteria to be used in evaluating proposals submitted to the Ministry for its consideration, and forward this list to the 16 Boards represented and to the Regional offices of the Ministry of Education.

   Based on follow-up consultations between OSPBA and the Ministry, these criteria have been finalized. A copy is attached for your information.

6. That OPSBA distribute copies of this report of the workshop proceedings to all Boards participating in the workshop.

Workshop proceedings were prepared by the facilitator, Ian D.R. Browm

Table 1

BOARDS NOT OFFERING JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN
(as of September, 1991)

REGION	BOARD
Central	Brant County Durham Haliburton County Halton Norfolk Prince Edward County Waterloo County Wellington County Wellington County RCSS Board (majority language section) Wentworth County York Region
Western	Bruce County Huron County Grey County Middlesex County Perth County
Midnorthern	Manitoulin

Table 2

Background Information

- All school boards will be required required to offer half-day Junior Kindergarten programs by September, 1994. Capital as well as operating funds under the General Legislative Grant regulations were provided to assist all school boards to offer half-day Junior Kindergarten programs beginning in 1990.

- New policy and program direction for Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten will be developed.

- Parents will retain the right to decide to register their child in Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten. Compulsory school attendance will still begin at age six.

- By September 1990, almost all boards and minority language sections were offering half-day Kindergarten programs and over 90% of boards and minority language sections were offering half-day Junior Kindergarten (exclusive of district school area boards).

- Based on 1991 population data and (September 31, 1991) preliminary enrolment data, 66.98% of four-year olds in the province are registered in JK programs.

- $267,000 in incentive funds for the purchase of large-scale learning equipment were granted to assist school boards and sections who were beginning Junior Kindergarten implementation in September, 1990.

- A second year of incentive funds was offered to boards that were starting new Junior Kindergarten programs or that were in the second year of implementation in September, 1991. A total of $151,000 was granted.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

Junior Kindergarten Workshop

AGENDA

10:00 am	**Welcome and Introductions** ▸ *Donna Cansfield, Chair OPSBA Curriculum Committee*
10:05 am	**Five Board Initiative: Education and Childcare Services for Four and Five Year Olds** ▸ *Representatives from the five boards*
10:30 am	**Grey County Proposal** ▸ *Janet Glasspool, Superintendent, Grey County Board of Education*
11:00 am	**Flexibility and Alternatives within Government's Policy** ▸ *Wally Beevor, Assistant Deputy Minister, Learning Programs Division* ▸ *Carola Lane, Assistant Deputy Minister, Regional Services*
11:30 am	**Questions and Answers on Ministry Policy**
12:00	**Introduction to Focus Group Discussions**
12:15 pm	**Lunch**
1:15 pm	**Overview of Morning Session** ▸ *Ian Brown, Facilitator*
1:45 pm	**Focus Group Discussions (2)**
2:45 pm	**Coffee**
3:00 pm	**Reporting Back**
3:30 pm	**Summing Up - Where do we go from here?** ▸ *Ian Brown, Facilitator*
4:30:	**Wrap-Up**

JK Workshop Registrations (March 9, 1992)

NORFOLK	▸ **J. Gerry Townsend**, Superintendent of Education ▸ **Joan Fallis**, Supervisor of Primary Program
PERTH COUNTY	▸ **Vern Tozer**, Board Chair ▸ **John Scott**, Trustee ▸ **Lily Horst**, Trustee ▸ **Mary Lou Taylor-Hawley**, Primary-Junior Consultant
BRANT COUNTY	▸ **Barbara Gillies**, Trustee ▸ **Alton Van Every**, Trustee
PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY	▸ **Larry L. Langdon**, Director of Education
MANITOULIN	▸ **Brenda Reid**, Trustee ▸ **Mac Hall**, Director of Education
HALTON	▸ **Pat Dickinson**, Coordinator of Early Childhood/Primary Education ▸ **Bob Williams**, Director of Education ▸ **Linda Glover**, Trustee
WELLINGTON COUNTY	▸ **Don Ross**, Board Chair ▸ **Terry Lynch**, Director of Education
HURON COUNTY	▸ **John Jewitt**, Trustee ▸ **Doug Garniss**, Trustee
MIDDLESEX COUNTY	▸ **T.R. Williamson**, Superintendent of Academic Affairs ▸ **B. Gear**, Early/Formative Years Consultant
WENTWORTH COUNTY	▸ **Jack Duncan**, Trustee (a.m. only) ▸ **Wayne Joudrie**, Superintendent of Schools ▸ **Don Matthews**, Trustee
GREY COUNTY	▸ **Janet Glasspool**, Superintendent ▸ **Sylvia Siitam-Ciarallo**, Special Assistant Teacher
DURHAM	▸ **Pauline Laing**, Director of Education ▸ **Louise Farr**, Board Chair ▸ **Pat Prentice**, Principal, Lord Elgin Public School ▸ **Carol Yeo**, Superintendent of Education ▸ **Cindy Dudley**, Trustee
HALIBURTON COUNTY	▸ **Leonard Salvatore**, Trustee ▸ **Mary Anne Wilson**, Trustee
BRUCE COUNTY	▸ **Ruth Vickers**, Vice-Principal
WATERLOO COUNTY	▸ **Mary Anne Christie**, Trustee
YORK REGION	▸ **Nancy Dunlop**, Trustee ▸ **Denis Middleton**, Trustee
OTHER	▸ **Ian Brown**, Facilitator ▸ **Donna Cansfield**, Chair, OPSBA Curriculum Committee ▸ **Ross Parry**, Acting Executive Director, OPSBA ▸ **Marie Pierce**, Director of Curriculum & Northern Affairs

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

- **Carola Lane**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Regional Services
- **Wally Beevor**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Learning Programs Division
- **Howat Noble**, Executive Co-ordinator, Learning Programs Secretariat
- **Pat Fleck**, Policy Co-ordinator, Learning Programs Secretariat